TODA MARRIAGE REGULATIONS AND TABOOS

By M. B. EMENEAU

IT IS many years now that the Todas of the Nilgiris in southern India have been known as a people of peculiar customs and it is thirty years since these peculiar customs were described with a wealth of detail by Rivers in his monumental volume.[1] Even now, however, much remains to be gleaned, and this paper attempts to supplement and correct Rivers' account of one important department of the life of the Todas, viz. the regulations concerning marriage and the taboos associated with these regulations.

A comprehensive account of the general framework of Toda organization is necessary, though it will be in part repetition of what is already well-known. The tribe has, first, two main divisions: tɔɪrðəs and töüviɭɭ.[2] For marriage purposes these divisions are endogamous. Each is subdivided into a number of divisions called *mod* (the familiar mund is the Badaga form of the word). This word is used also to denote any of the small villages of a few huts in which the Todas live, any of the dairies which stand isolated from a village, including the most sacred of these dairies, the tɪrmod, any of the funeral places, which usually are free of buildings, in fact any spot which at any time is the scene of Toda activities. But modoɪɭ, "man (or, people) of the mod" is used only of the members of a mod in its widest sense, that of a subdivision of the people, and in this paper mod will be used only in this sense. The tɔɪrðəs are reckoned to have ten mod, the töüviɭɭ five. These divisions are exogamous. Membership in a mod is determined by legal paternity; a man belongs to the mod of his "father," as does a woman until her marriage. The "father" is the man who has last given the bow to the mother of the child in the ceremony called pʊsʊʈt, "act of giving bow."[3] Physical paternity does not count at all for legal purposes, as Rivers has clearly stated. The legal father then is the legal husband of the child's mother, and the husband must be of a different mod from that to which his wife belonged by birth.

Further, a man cannot marry a woman if the two are poɭjoɪɭ. Membership in a group of people known as poɭjoɪɭ is determined by descent in the female line. The female members of the poɭjoɪɭ to whom a man belongs are in his own generation his sisters, the daughters of his mother's sisters, the

[1] W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas* (London, 1906).

[2] For an explanation of the phonetic symbols employed see the final paragraph of the paper.

[3] See Rivers, pp. 319-23.

582 601 618 daughters of his maternal grandmother's sisters' daughters, and so on; in the preceding generation his mother, his mother's sisters, his maternal grandmother's mother's daughters' daughters, and so on. To the generation younger than him belong his sisters' daughters, his mother's sisters' daughters' daughters, and so on. A man will also designate as his poɬjoɪɬ his mother's sons, his maternal grandmother's sons, his sisters' sons, and so on for any son of a woman who is related to him as poɬjoɪɬ, but not the descendants of these males. This network of relations in the female line cuts across *mod* divisions, and divides the toɪrðas at present into five exogamous sets of poɬjoɪɬ, the töŭvɪɬj into six. Rivers[4] has given a concrete example of how *mod*-relationships are handed down from one generation to the next; the relationships of poɬjoɪɬ are preserved in the same way even when links in the relationship are no longer remembered.

582 935 A man, then, while marrying within his own half of the whole tribe, must marry outside of his own *mod* and outside of his poɬjoɪɬ. As it is put by the Todas themselves, he must not marry a woman who is ŭɯ*d*mortkvæɪdvoj, "one who is born to one and the same *mod*" or poɬjoɪɬ to him. The other peculiarities of Toda marriage and sexual relationships, viz. polyandry, the institution whereby a man may take another's wife upon the payment of compensation, that by which a man may take a concubine from the other half of the tribe, and the general license permitting a man to have sexual intercourse with a woman who takes his fancy without any permanent tie being formed, seem to have blinded observers to these fundamental rules, which govern not only marriages, but also all sexual relationships. No man may marry or have intercourse with any woman who is related to him through a wholly male line or through a wholly female line. This is the system which is generally followed by the castes and communities of Hindu south India (with some exceptions which follow the rules prevalent in north India or some peculiar system of their own). The corollary following from it, that a man may marry his cross-cousin, obtains of course among the Todas as it does among the other south Indian communities following these rules. Among the Todas it is optional, though preferable, and is applied in the symmetrical fashion.[5] It seems to be the rule among many of the south Indian communities that the mother's brother's daughter is preferred, though without excluding the possibility of marriage to the father's sister's daughter; there is no trace of this preference for asymmetry among the Todas.

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[4] Page 490.

[5] Rivers, p. 514, and my informants generally.

5: Emeneau L-5 (1935-37) 1937 Toda

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Rivers' account of the general rule[6] is incomplete and in part incorrect. How this came about is of course not certain, but a guess may be hazarded on the cause. There is even now, when information is apparently more easily obtained on most subjects than it was thirty years ago, some reticence and embarrassment about the subject of poḷjoıḷ. It seems to be connected in part at least with the taboos that surround the relationship, perhaps more with the general air of indecency and ridicule with which the Todas approach the subject. This will be made clear when an account is given of the names of the divisions and the stories behind them. At the moment it is necessary to criticize Rivers' account. He interprets the term poḷjoıḷ (his püliol) as including both sets of prohibited affinities. This, being quite contrary to Toda usage, explains the impression he records that "it came almost as a new idea to some of the Todas that his püliol included all the people of his own clan" (i.e. mod). It was a new and wholly erroneous idea. The list of püliol which he gives is in part a mixture of two sets of relationships, in part incorrect, and as a whole incomplete. A man may not marry the daughters of his father's brothers (Rivers' heading i) or the sisters of his father (heading iii), since they are ün*d*mortkvæıdvoj. The daughters of his mother's sisters (heading ii) and the daughters of his sisters (heading iii) are forbidden, since they are poḷjoıḷ. His fourth head, the daughters of the sisters of his father's father, gave him trouble because of the two cases of marriages to such persons found in the genealogies.[7] The truth is that such marriages are not forbidden. The sisters of a man's paternal grandfather are not poḷjoıḷ to him, but ün*d*mortkvæıdvoj; they cannot have married his ün*d*mortkvæıdvoj, and their daughters will not be related to him in any prohibited way. The rule given[8] that a person must not marry the child of his mot ʃiṇj (matchuni, i.e. cross-cousin) is incorrect. His cross-cousin may have married a man of his own mod, in which case the daughter will be forbidden to him. If she has married outside his mod, there are no objections. Again, if a man's male mot ʃiṇj has married a woman who is poḷjoıḷ to the man's mother, the mot ʃiṇj's daughter will be forbidden to the man; otherwise, not. The case in the last paragraph on p. 511 of Rivers' work, that of a man marrying a daughter of his sister's daughter, is impossible, since she would be his poḷjoıḷ. The final case in this paragraph, the marriage of two brothers to the daughter of their sister's son, violated no rule; the disapproval that attended the marriage was undoubtedly due to the disproportion in age, not as such, but as depriving

[6] Rivers, pp. 509–11.
[7] Rivers, p. 511.
[8] Rivers, p. 511 *mod.* and again p. 513.

582 601 618 114 some young man of an opportunity to marry, a consideration which must always have some weight in a community as small as that of the Todas. It should be remarked further that relations of poljoɪl are extremely hard to trace in Rivers' genealogical tables. This is partly due to the intrinsic difficulty of using for this purpose a set of tables constructed for another purpose, partly to the fact that there are many inaccuracies of detail in the assignment of children both to fathers and to mothers. To set all right two sets of tables should be constructed, one for each kind of relationship: whether any useful purpose would be served by the task may be considered doubtful.

196 A note on the semantics of the word poljoɪl may be given here. It means "man (or person, or people) of the polj." The most usual meaning of polj is "sacred dairy," a meaning which will not explain our word. Another meaning is found, viz. "Badaga house" (the Toda house is called ɑɪs). A sentence such as the following no doubt gives the clue: emelom ŭɯd-voljoɪlɔɪvemi, "we all are persons of the same (ŭɯd) polj (i.e. poljoɪl)." It is quite obvious that our word is based on an obsolete meaning "house," the members of which, a man, his mother, his sisters, form the nucleus of the whole poljoɪl institution. The semantic development of polj should be stated then in the following order: first, "house;" second, "dairy." The second meaning then drove out, for reasons at present unexplainable, the first except in the application to the houses of the Badagas and in the compound poljoɪl and sentences like the one given above, which are rather based on the old first meaning of the word then reformed on the basis of the word poljoɪl. That this interpretation of the Toda words is correct is seen from the Tamil cognate paḷḷi, "building, temple."

613 539 As was said above, there are at present five sets of poljoɪl among the toɪrðas. Another has in recent years become extinct by the death of its last female member, sinuɪl of the keruɪvoɪl (found in Rivers' Table 28 as Sinul). Of the remaining ones the names and stories are as follows. The kŭɑtæɪnboljoɪl or oɪrvɯtɣɑɪkvoljoɪl is said to be descended from kŭɑtæɪn (Rivers' Kwoten). Of him it is told that his spiritual power was so great that he lit fire on the surface of a stream; his poljoɪl make fire by friction with great ease. The other name is based on a story that one man of the line bought for six rupees six (oɪr) cakes made with chillies (the cake is called pɯṭ). A crow (kɑɪk) carried one off, and the man, leaving the others behind, chased the crow, whereupon crows carried off all the other cakes. This story like most of the others to follow ridicules the stupidity of the members of the line. Another is called moɣðɯtkoɪtʃvojvoljoɪl, "people of the house of one who heated the child at the fire." The story goes that in

618 539 order to strengthen a new-born child, they smeared it all over with butter and put it in front of the fire; as a result the child died. Another is called mukoɾðurktoɪɾjvmɨvojvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of those who carried large baskets to the mukoɾ swamp" or moɪvɣoɪɳoðmöʃɣŭaɾtvojvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of those who ground pepper without seeing the deer." It is told that seeing carrion-eating birds circling over a swamp they assumed that there was a dead deer there and went off with large baskets to bring back the flesh, telling the women meanwhile to grind a large heap of [83] pepper for the curry. Of the other two, more indelicate stories are told. One is called pikukveɳvotsvojvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of one who put butter on the navel." A woman covered her navel with butter and made a dog lick it and have intercourse with her. The other is called puɪltʃvoʃjoɪʃ. It is said that formerly a man and woman of this poʃjoɪʃ had sexual intercourse with one another. The women of this line are said to be particularly [82] strong in their sexual passions; the verb with this meaning ɑrtsti, "she is passionate," and the noun ɑrikn, "passionate woman" are tabooed under the conditions described below, and it is said that the element puɪltʃ–, not otherwise found, has the meaning of these tabooed words.

Six poʃjoɪʃ of the töŭvɨʃj survive: one other is known to have become extinct some years ago with the death of kŭɯɪsjɣŭmɪɾ of the koʃemoɪʃ (Kurikudr in Rivers' Table 72). The others are as follows. The ŭɑtvɑɣðurspodjvæɪʈoɪdjvojvoʃjoɪʃ," people of the house of one who hunted the pig in the ŭɑtvɑx swamp" are so named because one of the line hunted a pig which he had seen for a whole day and night and yet let it escape him. Another is called nöɪŋgoɪʈkvɑrɨɣɑɾtjvojvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of those who sent fuel to nöɪŋgoɪɾ." Men of this line saw a hare, and intending to hunt it for food, set the family to work to collect fuel to roast it for three days. A third is called oɪrvmʈɣeɪrjvoʃjoɪʃ. The story is the same as for the oɪrvɯʈɣɑɪkvoʃjoɪʃ of the other division, except that the cakes were in a basket mukeɪrj, to which the element keɪrj in the name is equivalent. Another, the pevɯɪtɣoɬɪjvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of the stealer of a large piece of meat," are so named because one of the line stole a large piece of meat at the sacrifice of a calf (æɪrɣɯmtt, "act of killing male buffalo").[9] A fifth is called kuðɯrɣoɪlvɑʃjtʃetɑpeʃköθkjvojvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of one who seizing a horse's leg pole-vaulted." It is told that a man, finding a dead horse, cut off the leg and vaulted with it until he reached the door of a house where he was beaten by the occupants. The last is called ömɨöŭkörkojvɯɲæɪtpuɪʈvɯrkuʈvojvoʃjoɪʃ, "people of the house of one who taking the milking-pot in his left hand at the tiɪ dairy called ömɨöŭ broke

[9] See Rivers, p. 274.

4 [Sets of poljo:ɬ among the to:rðaS -- ANALYST]

618 wind loudly eighteen times." As a result of this exploit, the men of this
539 poɭjoıɭ are forbidden to become poɭoıɭ to this tiı. Another story is told of these people, similar to that told of the moγðutkoıt ʃvojvoɭjoıɭ of the other division. It is said that a child was heated at the fire (it seems with the intention of making ghee from it) until it died. Then it was hung up on a
[522] tree and the people wept, closing one eye. All these stories were checked by getting them from as many different informants as possible, and agreement on them is very close, though details differ in the different accounts. The large element of the ridiculous in them puts them in line with the kŭwdzwl, the Toda's favorite sport when sitting about in a company. Stories are told of members of the company in which the wildest and most improbable actions are attributed to them. Why the poɭjoıɭ should have become the object of such sport it is hard to say, but under the circumstances one cannot seek for much historical truth in the stories.

602 A number of taboos on actions and language operate in the intercourse
835 between ŭwdmortkvæıdvoj and poɭjoıɭ of opposite sex. The primary one is the taboo on sexual intercourse, and most of the others are obviously to be considered as avoidances of incitement to this. The taboos begin to operate at puberty. They apply also to relations between parents and adult children, especially between father and daughter (it is to be remembered that a daughter when married no longer belongs strictly to the father's mod), and to relations between father-in-law and daughter-in-law (she is strictly not related to him as ŭwdmortkvæıdvoj) and between mother-in-law and son-in-law (she is not in any sense his poɭjoıɭ or his ŭwdmortkvæıdvoj). It is said that the taboos have now slackened somewhat except between father and daughter, and the impression given is that observance of them was never very rigid except when a fairly large company was present. For example, it is clear from Rivers' account and from my informants' accounts that irregular sexual intercourse was and is common. When it is found out and becomes known to the people of the tribe, the noıjm or council takes cognizance of it and imposes on the man a fine of at least one buffalo.

602 Most of the taboos on action, other than that on sexual intercourse, seem designed to prevent physical contact or the unchaperoned presence in one another's company of a man and a woman of the prohibited degrees of affinity. In the latter class must be put the prohibition against two such persons traveling together unaccompanied from one place to another. An exception is made for a man and his mother. Taboos against physical contact are as follows. They may not sit on the same tuŋ or raised earth seat; they may not touch one another, and so may not assist one another in dress-

[1] [See pp 106 and 107, cat. 539 — Analyst]

602 ing the hair or in bathing. The latter is so extended that one may not even be present while the other is bathing, though the preparing and bringing of bath-water is allowed and is as a matter of course done for a father by [264] his daughter. Another curious taboo may be placed here, though it is limited in its operation in such a way that its allocation is somewhat doubtful. The water with which a man washes his right hand after eating (it should be remembered that in India the food is handled with the right hand only) must not be thrown away by his female poɉjoiɉ or ümdmortkvæidvoj who is older than himself. His mother may do so and normally does until he marries, when his wife normally performs the office. His daughter or daughter-in-law may also dispose of the water. There is also a prohibition against breaking wind in the presence of a ümdmortkvæidvoj or poɉjoiɉ of the opposite sex.

602 533 Men and women seldom sing together, though it sometimes happens, and more especially in the case of husband and wife. But ümdmortkvæidvoj and poɉjoiɉ of opposite sex are forbidden not only to sing together but even to sing at the same time in one another's hearing. If a man is singing out of sight but within hearing of a woman of these categories and she wishes to burst into song, she will first ask who is singing and then regulate her actions accordingly; so also if a man hears a woman singing. One can only suppose that if they sang at the same time, they would be considered to be acting as if they were marriageable.

521 602 196 192 References to all subjects, whether regarded by our communities as decent or indecent, are very freely made in Toda conversations, as I have had occasion to observe when getting information from parties in which both men and women were present. Very frank speech is usual with women as well as men. But between poɉjoiɉ or ümdmortkvæidvoj of opposite sex, or even when one of these is present in the company but not actually addressed, this freedom is taboo. Reference, whether direct or by circumlocution, is forbidden to sexual intercourse, menstruation, the private parts, including by extension the nipple, the navel, the armpit, and pubic hair, to [333] the secreta, or breaking wind. Biting the skin of the neck while making love seems to be common, and the red mark which lasts for some time is [522] a subject for the jest: "You have been bitten by a tiger." Use of the compound verb stems which denote the act of biting in this way (muɾɣüɑrt–, "neck-cut," and kïɑrtɣüɑrt–, "cutting-give") or any indirect reference or jesting is forbidden between people between whom the taboos operate. So also is the use of the word kümɨdjvöm, "fowl-lice," which also denotes the insects found in the pubic hair or the hair of the armpits; reference to these insects is also forbidden. Other words are forbidden in specific senses.

Thus aḍð–, "dig," is allowed when a word for "pit" is used with it, but forbidden when used with a word meaning "woman," in which case it means "rape;" so also kɯ ʃt–, "pluck up by the roots," which with a word for woman means "rape." The word nɑrtj–, "make walk," is permitted when ɯr, "buffalo," is compounded with it in the sense "drive buffaloes on migration" or "pay a buffalo as a fine for pollution of the dairy,"[10] or when in combination with a word for "bead" it means "string (beads)," or in other uses not involving indecency; when a word for "woman" is used with it, it means "have sexual intercourse with" and is forbidden. So also the very common verb pɑtj–, "seize, take," which with a word for woman means "have sexual intercourse with." The stem oɪj–, "become," is very frequent, usually in compounds; when used by itself, it means "menstruate" and is forbidden. The word poɪʈj–, "shout" is forbidden in the sense "(woman) cries out during sexual intercourse." Again *atvɑt* is an imperative with literal meaning "in that direction-seize." It usually is found in contexts where it means "take this and hold it stretched out that way;" it is forbidden in this sense since the same utterance can also mean as applied to a woman "have sexual intercourse in animal position." It can also be used as an exclamation "nonsense!" and this use is not forbidden. In the same way puɪn, "gold bangle in a dairy," is forbidden when used in the sense "privates of a young girl." Similarly poɪθj, "moss," may not be mentioned since a variety of moss is used during menstruation as a sanitary napkin. Women are tattooed and any reference to the process of tattooing or to the markings is forbidden. The word for "tabooed words," kɪrpoɳt, lit. "inferior-words," is itself tabooed.

These language taboos produce an interesting result in the field of social habits. Wordy quarrels about marriage arrangements, the financing and details of ceremonies, and other affairs are very common among Toda men. These quarrels most frequently take place at the large gatherings at ceremonies of all kinds. Since on most such occasions, especially at funerals, many women are present, the probable presence of ʊʊdmortkvæidvoj or poɭjoɪɭ within hearing prevents the use of indecent language by the quarrelers. My informants tell me that this is the rule also in quarrels at purely male gatherings; evidently indecency has not become an element in abuse under any circumstances, since its prohibition in some circumstances has prevented the growth of a habit. I am also told that quite recently, with the relaxing of all taboos and the example of Tamil speakers, a certain amount of indecency has crept into the language of abuse.

[10] See Rivers, pp. 293–305.

5: Emeneau L-5 (1935-37) 1937 Toda

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Enquiry into the details of the moγðoɪʈjt institution (called by Rivers mokhthoditi)[11] supplements Rivers' account in some important details. For all legal purposes, i.e. membership of mod and the consequent relations to the tribe as a whole, Rivers is correct. Children of these unions are legally children of the man who has given the bow to the mother. In investigating restrictions on the freedom to form these unions it was found that there are two classes of union. In one the man who takes the woman gives only a cloak (puɪtγuɭj). Children of this type of union and the man's legal children may form moγðoɪʈjt unions without any restrictions, except that such a union may not be formed while the parents are still living together in a union of this kind. When the union in the earlier generation ceases, a union in the next generation may be formed.

In the other class of union the man gives to the woman jewelry and makes to her male relatives the koɪlmilvɯḍθt salutation ("act of falling on leg," i.e. kneeling and putting to one's head the other's feet in turn; of the one who raises his feet it is said, koɪlγoɪʈj–, "leg-show"). Children of the union are then in the same relation to the man's legal children as if they were ŭɯdmortkvæɪdvŏj, and the same rules hold for unions between them and between their descendants as for unions between ŭɯdmortkvæɪdvoj and their descendants. For example, a half-brother and a half-sister may not form the union; their children may form the union, for they are pseudo-mot ʃiɳj. Children of half-brothers may not form the union, but their children may. Rivers[12] mentions the union of kŭɯɪsiɑɭf of the töŭviɭj with piɭj-muɾγ of the toɪrðas. He insisted on giving ter for her[13] as if she could be his legal wife, and lived with her for many years (which is unusual in these unions), having by her four children, who were regarded by everyone as his own except that they belong legally to the toɪrðas. This seems to have been the first case in which ter was given in one of these unions, and there have been some later imitations of the precedent. This type of union is merely an extension of the type in which the koɪlmilvɯḍθt salutation is performed, and the regulations governing unions of the descendants are the same.

The taboos described above operate also between all those who are in a pseudo-relation of ŭɯdmortkvæɪdvoj because of a moγðoɪʈjt union. In the first type of union they cease to operate when the union is dissolved, in the second they are permanent in their operation, just as is the prohibition against further unions.

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[11] Described in Rivers, pp. 526–29.

[12] Page 534 *mod.*

[13] See Rivers, pp. 523–25.

194 The Toda words given in this paper are written in the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association with some changes. The language has three t-phonemes: t a tongue-tip dental, *t* a tongue-tip alveolar, and ṭ a retroflex; there are three d-phonemes with the same positions, d, *d*, ḍ; only two n-phonemes are found, n alveolar and ṇ retroflex. The language has a peculiar sibilant phoneme, which is homorganic with the alveolar stops and has the body of the tongue well flattened and lowered from the roof of the mouth, thus differentiating it from ʃ in the same position, while its position differentiates it from s. For this sibilant I write *s*. Three r-phonemes are to be distinguished: *r* a one-flap sound at the roots of the upper teeth (the IPA symbol for this sound is not available), r a trill in alveolar position, and ṛ a trill well behind the alveolar ridge, i.e. in retroflex position. The symbol j represents the English y-sound except when between voiceless consonants or final after a voiceless consonant, when it also is voiceless. Of the vowel symbols, ɯ is high, back, unrounded, ö mid, mixed, rounded. Four l-phonemes have to be distinguished, and the limitations of the printer's stock have forced me to write them as follows: l alveolo-dental voiced, *l* alveolo-dental voiceless, ļ retroflex voiced, *ļ* retroflex voiceless.

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[For word and language taboos see category 116, pp. 106-110.]